



DISCOVER

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IMPACT



HOT MODERNISM COOL RESOURCE

Through an exhibition, book and digital archive, UQ architects not only engaged with the community, but also convinced local firms to share their records publicly, and inspired the state government to consider establishing a heritage working party.

Growing up in Queensland in the late 1980s and '90s meant summers spent jumping off the 10-metre diving board at inner-city Spring Hill's Centenary Pool, or having fun at South Bank, across the river from the CBD overlooking the long and winding curves of the Riverside Expressway.

The unique designs of these locations reflect the changing attitudes of mid-century architects and formed the first wave of post-war, modernist Queensland architecture.

Researchers from The University of Queensland, who work surrounded by buildings from this era every day, recognise their value but also their risk of being lost, and so studied them in-depth in the exciting Australian Research Council Linkage Project (2011-13), *Hot Modernism*.

Originally called *Architectural Practice in Post-war Queensland: Building and Interpreting an Oral History Archive*, the project uncovers the houses, buildings and public spaces of the modernist period, revealing and documenting their stories, while raising much-needed awareness of Queensland's rapidly disappearing post-war buildings.

Hot Modernism delivered three major outcomes: a public exhibition, a book and a digital archive.

The project set out to explore the foundation and growth of modern architecture in post-war Queensland and has had widespread impact. More than 18,000 Queensland residents who attended the exhibition were

educated and entertained over the course of four months, and the *Digital Archive of Queensland Architecture* the project team created is now used by the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection as its first resource when listing buildings from the post-war period.

"Prior to our project, a survey of modern architecture had not been conducted since 1959," says Professor John Macarthur, Director of UQ's Architecture, Theory, Criticism and History Research Centre and lead researcher on the project.

"There is a real lack of resources dealing with Queensland architecture, specifically post-war buildings, and the architects who designed them."

Professor Macarthur worked with Dr Deborah van der Plaats, Dr Janina Gosseye and Dr Andrew Wilson from UQ's School of Architecture, and Dr Jane Hunter, Craig McNamara, Andre Gebers and Andrae Muys from UQ's School of Information Technology and Electrical Engineering/eResearch Lab, along with Gavin Bannerman from the State Library of Queensland, Robert Riddel from Riddel Architecture, and Donald Watson, respected architect and historian, to execute the successful project.

"The story of Queensland's post-war architecture is largely a tacit one," says Dr van der Plaats.

"The architects who worked and studied at this time possess knowledge of the key events, buildings, practices and institutions of the period, but this information is often only spoken – most commonly within the confines

of the architectural community – and remains unrecorded."

Brisbane and South-East Queensland grew rapidly in the late 1940s and '50s, as a result of immigration and the baby boom, and before long Queensland was facing a severe housing shortage. During this time communities looked for better, more modern ways to live that would suit the tropical and subtropical climate of the state.

"In 1945 Queensland needed to build housing for a large number of people, cheaply," says Dr van der Plaats.

"These issues stimulated creativity among architects of the day as they began to look for solutions to build on a modest budget. The architecture that began appearing reflected these conditions and, for the first time, global trends."

Dr Gosseye says the opinion of people on the street appears to be that buildings from this modernist era do not have the same heritage importance of pre-war buildings and traditional 'Queenslanders' because they are not old enough.

"Many modernist buildings, including those considered significant by the architects of the day, have already been lost largely due to this lack of appreciation," she says.

"By documenting these histories through interviews and photographic collection, the research will record, for the first time, this threatened historical knowledge.

"Moreover, this project is also about teaching people to appreciate the unique aesthetic of these buildings."

The book *Hot Modernism Queensland Architecture 1945–1975* is another major outcome of the project. Edited and authored by Professor Macarthur, Dr van der Plaats, Dr Gosseye and Dr Wilson, it also includes papers by Dr Donald Watson, Dr Robert Riddel, Alice Hampson, Elizabeth Musgrave and Dr Silvia Micheli, among others.

It highlights the houses, hotels and public buildings built during the post-war period that were influenced by global modernist art and architecture and complements the successful exhibition held at the State Library of Queensland in 2014.

The *Hot Modernism Building Modern Queensland 1945–1975* exhibition was attended by more than 18,000 people and was one of the State Library's most successful exhibitions ever.

Deborah van der Plaats and Janina Gosseye, working in collaboration with Gavin Bannerman and Kevin Wilson from the State Library of Queensland, curated the exhibition.

Visitors walked through a full-scale recreation of a 1957 house, chilled out in a 1960s living room, and were able to flex their creative muscles in the *Design our City* space. *Hot Modernism* also featured a free Sunday afternoon film program and gallery tours, led by guest architects in the library's gallery. Expert presentations, lectures and social events consistently drew crowds.

The ongoing digital component of the project, Digital Archive of Queensland Architecture, is an interactive online tool that can be accessed by the public. The mixed media site allows users to explore the key people, projects and firms of architecture in Queensland.

An interactive online database, it will continue to grow, comprising all research material, efficiently organised and freely accessible for further enquiry.

Using innovative semantic web technologies to visually map the connections that bind these oral histories to each other and to related materials (such as drawings, photographs, books and manuscripts), the project has produced a new multimedia resource on Queensland architecture and design.

Hot Modernism's impact has spanned beyond its initial scope with the creation of a heritage working party, launched by The Honourable Dr Steven Miles, Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection, to explore and investigate innovative programs to conserve places of cultural heritage significance.

Taking inspiration from community-initiated programs currently conserving natural heritage, the working party is expected to include representatives from the Australian Institute of Architects, the Queensland Heritage Council, the heritage tourism sector, and the philanthropic, social enterprise and volunteer sectors. Professor Macarthur has been invited to join.

The *Hot Modernism* book and exhibition received nation-wide media exposure and positive reviews from within the architecture community and the general public.

The UQ School of Architecture partnered with the State Library of Queensland, the Australian Research Council, Conrad Gargett, Wilson Architects, BVN and Riddel Architecture.

The partner firms are some of the oldest in Queensland and often had archives dating back to the late nineteenth century. The State Library of Queensland is the primary institution concerned with Queensland history, and is one of only two libraries in Queensland that collect architectural material.

Other collaborators who contributed to the project were UQ's Fryer Library, Artspace Mackay, Brisbane City Council, Gold Coast City Council, National Archives of Australia and Queensland State Archives.

The project has demonstrated the relevance of historic record-keeping and protection, and has encouraged firms to consider the legacy of their practices and future of their collections.

Queensland residents walked away from *Hot Modernism* with a greater understanding of, and appreciation for, modernist architecture and the issues that impact living in a modern city.

The positive impact will continue to be felt throughout the state as development decisions are made for generations to come.

uq.edu.au/research/impact

(Image credit: Riverside Expressway – Hot Modernism exhibition, State Library of Queensland, 9 July–12 October 2014)

Progress to date:

8 November 2012: Public Forum 1 – *[Hi]stories of Queensland post-war architecture 1945–1975*, State Library of Queensland

5 March 2013: Public Forum 2 – *Architectural Education in Post war Queensland*, State Library of Queensland

27 August 2013: Public Forum 3 – *Visions for Brisbane*, State Library of Queensland

7 November 2013: Public Forum 4 – *Climate and the Queensland House*, State Library of Queensland

July 2014: Archive – *Digital Archive of Queensland Architecture* launched

July–September 2014: Film Competition – *Hot and Bothered: Save Modern Queensland*

July–October 2014: Major Public Exhibition – *Hot Modernism, Building Modern Queensland*, State Library of Queensland

29 September 2014: Workshop – *Save Modern Queensland*, State Library of Queensland, Brisbane

October 2015: Book – *Hot Modernism Queensland Architecture 1945–1975* published

9 March 2016: Book – Official book launch and announcement of special working party on Queensland Heritage

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